



THE NUGGET

NEWSLETTER FOR THE ARMY PACIFIC REGION
PACIFIC REGION CIVILIAN PERSONNEL OPERATIONS
CENTER, FORT RICHARDSON, ALASKA

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Patricia Pearson, Director

Looking Forward

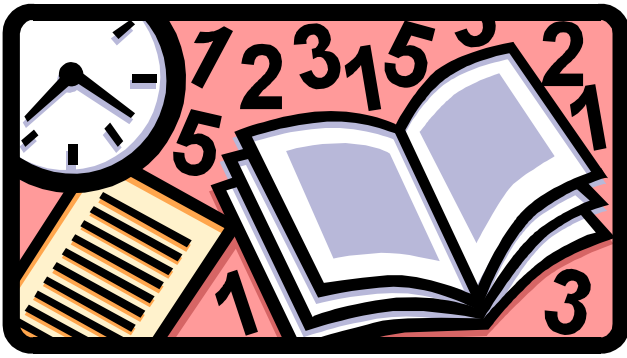
As we enter 2002, I marvel at the speed with which information flows. This information flow has caused changes, which affect us in both our business and financial lives.

The events of September 11th have also created policy, regulatory, and procedural changes significantly affecting each of us. We all remain steadfast in our commitment to individually and collectively serve the Army in whatever capacity is necessary.

Our primary goal within the Pacific Region is to maintain high standards of customer service in the midst of these major changes. The articles in this newsletter provide you with guidance and information for Civilian Personnel issues which affect you.

I invite your comments and want to hear from you on ways to improve processes within the personnel arena.

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EXPANDED E-LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

The Pacific Region CPOC recently received word that DA has completely revamped its "Computer-Based Training" (CBT) website. Rather than us trying to reword their original message, we decided it best to publish just pertinent excerpts which detail the services provided and enrollment procedures. We strongly encourage you to explore these possibilities as a means for both job-related and self-development opportunities at a cost that fits all of our budgets!

Welcome to the NEW Army CBT Training System & Welcome to E-Learning!

We are pleased to announce that the United States Army e-Learning partnership license with SmartForce has been extended and expanded. It will continue with significant enhancements, capabilities and added features. All authorized personnel will be able to access over 1,500 Information Technology, Business Skills, and Interpersonal Skills courses from any location, around the clock (24/7) and have access to personal mentoring for all certifications and many other programs.

Please follow the below steps for access to the New Army e-Learning/Web Based training.

If you have an account on ARMYCBT:

- Obtain an Army Knowledge Online email address/account, if not already accomplished (go to www.us.army.mil to establish your account)
- Email me your ARMYCBT ID and AKO email address and we will make the database update for you.

Everyone:

- Go to www.us.army.mil
- Obtain an Army Knowledge Online email address/account, if not already accomplished.
- Follow the link in the Army Wide Announcements area to the NEW CBT training information to access

the new e-Learning system.

- Read the instructions for accessing the new e-Learning system and follow the link to www.smartforce.com/corporate
- At the logon screen, sign in with the ID and password as shown in the instructions, NOT your AKO email address.
- Complete the profile including your accurate/complete AKO email address and select a new personal password for My SmartForce.
- You will be sent an acknowledgement message by email to your AKO address - you may then login with your AKO ID and selected password.

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SUBMITTING RESUMES AND SELF-NOMINATIONS

Applying for positions within the Pacific Region is a two-step process. Step 1 consists of preparing and submitting a resume to include the appropriate supplemental data, if you are an external applicant AND Step 2 consists of submitting a self-nomination to indicate interest in being considered for a vacancy.

An applicant may submit a resume through the Department of Army's (DA) Resume Builder, or in the format provided in our region's Job Information Kit.

To use DA's Resume Builder, an applicant can log-onto www.cpol.army.mil. From this web-site, an applicant can click on "Employment," and then "Army's Vacancy Announcements" or "Army's Resume Builder." The Pacific Region's vacancy announcements have a built-in link to the DA Resume Builder found at the end of the announcement. After carefully reviewing the announcements, an applicant can then elect to build and submit a resume on-line.

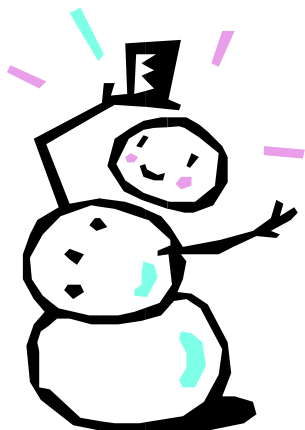
The DA Resume Builder is a tool to assist applicants in preparing a resume. It offers the ability to save and edit their resume. Once an applicant creates a new resume on-line, he/she may electronically send the saved resume using the "Send out Existing Resume" in the DA Resume Builder's "Welcome" page. (Saving a resume in this database does not automatically send a resume to a specific Civilian Personnel Operations Center (CPOC). An applicant must indicate, via "Send out Existing Resume," which CPOC they wish to submit his/her resume.)

An applicant can also submit a resume to this region via email. Simply include your resume in the body of an email message. Keeping in mind that the resume is within the three-page limitation. (It is recommended that an applicant prepare the resume in a word document first and then copy and paste into the body of an email message. Preparing in a word document will indicate the page length.) The email address to submit resumes is resume@cpocpac.army.mil. The subject line must state "Resume."

To be considered for a specific vacancy, an applicant must submit a self-nomination. An applicant can submit a self-nomination by locating this region's vacancy announcements through CPOL. These vacancy announcements have a built-in link to the self-nomination form. **An applicant must remember that this region must have a resume on file before a self-nomination will be processed.**

Or if an applicant has a resume on file with this region, he/she can submit a self-nomination to this region via email, in the format provided in our region's Job Information Kit. Simply include the self-nomination in the body of an email message. The email address to submit self-nomination(s) is resume@cpocpac.army.mil. The subject line must state "Self-Nomination + VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER", e.g. Self Nomination53FC00XXXX.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

You may know your CSR personally or you may not even know that you have a CSR. Believe me - it's not just another acronym. Your Customer Service Representative is the conscientious

individual who makes sure that you are paid correctly and on time. CSRs are not employees of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. Because they do belong to the local command, duties and responsibilities may vary slightly between areas. Outlined below are some of the issues that your local CSR may be able to assist you with.

CSR's complete payroll processing involving diverse pay plans, different types of appointments, and different schedules (bi-weekly, multiple shifts, round-the-clock operations or irregular tours of duty.) They are experts on health benefits, entitlements, obligations for FICA, overtime computations, differential pay, retirement, Thrift Savings Plan, taxes, premium pay, special pay, FLSA – you name it.

CSR's field a variety of questions and complaints not just from employees, but supervisors, timekeepers, and personnel staff. They answer pay questions, request or verify information, and resolve complicated problems and discrepancies in master records by retroactively reconciling and balancing pay data. They explain entitlements and methods of computations based on standardized civilian pay rules, regulations, and laws.

As Security Officers for the Defense Civilian Payroll System, CSR's establish security access and give security briefings to all automated timekeepers on an annual basis. They provide training to timekeepers, supervisors, and personnel employees on pay and leave issues.

CSR's complete unemployment compensation, loss of wages, changes in address, W-4's, savings bonds, direct-deposit information, and other external forms as required. And...remember - they also ensure collection of any monies owed the Government by employees.

Pacific Region CSR's
Alaska (except COE, MEPS and CRTA): (907) 384-2197
Corps of Engineers, Alaska: (907) 753-2566
Corps of Engineers, Hawaii: (808) 438-3312
Hawaii (except COE): (808) 456-5091
Japan: 263-8666

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PACIFIC REGION WELCOMES FASCLASS II

On November 26, 2001, Pacific CPOC hosted classes in the use of this new version of our automated FASCLASS system. FASCLASS II, or F2 as some call it, provides users access to over 180 thousand currently established position descriptions. The intent is clear: managers should no longer need to struggle to create new position descriptions (PD) from scratch.

As with the previous FASCLASS system, access to the updated system varies according to user privileges assigned. Classifiers and Delegated Classification Authority (DCA) managers, for example, generally register in a restricted account with FASCLASS II that allows full access to include editing abilities, establishing new PDs, etc. DCA managers are also provided up to five administrative accounts to assist them in carrying out their classification responsibilities. Others may have access to a public view where they would have the ability to view and research position descriptions, but would not have the edit capability or the ability to create new position descriptions.

One of the major changes introduced by F2 is the manager's leadership/training questionnaire. The survey is required for all GS-11 and higher positions. When a manager or classifier creates a new PD or edits an existing PD, F2 generates a survey request. This is done via a series of automatic links and emails. The manager links to an automated DA training survey and answers from five to twelve simple questions regarding the leadership role of the position. The manager must complete the survey in order for the PD to appear in the "public" area of F2. The survey results in an additional sentence or two being added to the PD (at present) with recommendations on leadership courses which would be appropriate for such a position. It also gives the DA staff a sense of possible training needs for senior service schools and other training programs.

Another new feature is the fact that F2 generates PD numbers. The current job numbers are all five digits. Under F2, the system automatically assigns sequential PD numbers upon the establishment of a new PD. Also, the new system is using a six digit PD number. This feature has created some problems for users who have standardized PDs when they want to make changes to the existing PD but don't need to change the number. For example, when the manager wants to make a pen and ink change to the PD. The current work-around for this is to advise the CPOC in an email, and the CPOC will advise the FASCLASS II program manager at HQDA, who will make the change. Hopefully program changes will be made shortly to resolve this workaround.

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THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN PROGRAM FOR UNIFORMED SERVICE MEMBERS

ATTENTION all Army service members - active duty, reserve and National Guard.

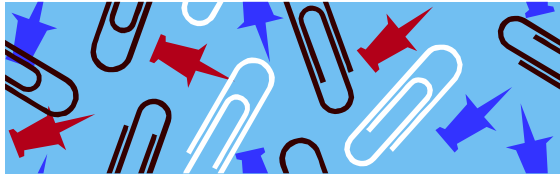
You are now eligible to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan for Military (TSP- U).

If you joined the uniformed services on or before December 8, 2001, you may elect to participate in the TSP- U during the initial open season that began on 9 Oct 2001 and will end on 31 Jan 2002.

You sign up to participate in the TSP- U by submitting a TSP Election Form (TSP-U-1) to your local military Personnel Service Center, or electronically through the Employee/Member Self - Service System (E/MSS) at www.dfas.mil. You'll then click on the E/MSS button that is under "Money Matters".

Headquarters, Department of Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (HQDA, DCSPER) selected the Army Benefits Center - Civilian (ABC-C) to provide information and assistance to Army service members on this new benefit. The ABC-C is part of the SWCPOC and is located on Ft Riley, KS.

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PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS **SUPPORT FORM REQUIREMENTS**

Paragraph 3-1, Army Regulation 690-400:
"Performance plans are recorded on DA Form 7223-1 for Ratees covered by the base system; on DA Form 7222-1 for Ratees in the senior system. Copies of applicable performance plans are attached to completed performance appraisals which are submitted to the Civilian Personnel Offices for processing."

The rating official rates each objective on the DA Form 7222-1 to substantiate overall performance rating in Part VIII filled in by the senior rater and/or rater, as appropriate, as follows:

E=Excellence
S=Success
NI=Needs improvement
F=Fails

SPECIAL APPRAISALS: Special appraisals are not sent to CPAC and/or CPOC when they are completed. Rather, they are attached to the annual appraisal. Since special appraisals are not input into Modern DCPDS, performance award nominations are not initiated.

Departing raters issue special appraisals for all ratees under their supervision who have been under approved performance plans for at least 120 days. Issue early annual appraisals for those ratees who have 120 days or less remaining until their annual appraisal due date.

When a ratee leaves to accept another Federal position after completing at least 120 days under an approved performance plan, a special appraisal is prepared to provide to the gaining supervisor. Special and annual appraisals are not required if they would serve no purpose to Army or the ratee, i.e. employee is retiring or accepting employment in the private sector.

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TRAVEL BENEFITS

The Fiscal Year 2002 National Defense Authorization Act allows official travelers to accept promotional items, including frequent flier miles, and use for personal travel. According to the new law, any promotional items through official travel belong to the traveler. The Act also grandfather(s) mileage

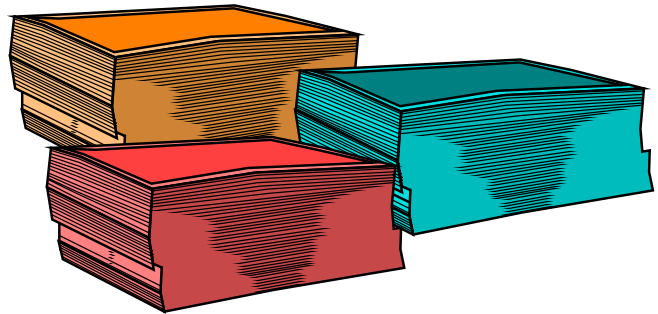
received before its passing. As the law states, this includes "frequent traveler benefits such as points or miles, upgrades, or access to carrier clubs or facilities." The change includes allowing personal use of the promotional items "regardless of when the mileage was accrued." People who have accumulated mileage in frequent flyer accounts through official travel over the past years own all of that mileage. Government travelers cannot accept special promotional items that are not available to the general public. Promotional material must be obtained under the same terms as those offered to the general public and must be at no additional Government cost," according to implementing instructions from the Per Diem, Travel And Transportation Allowance Committee, a Department of Defense activity.

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NEW GENERAL SCHEDULE PAY TABLES **AVAILABLE**

The new pay tables for GS employees include a 3.6 percent across-the-board raise and increases that vary by regional cost of living. The new raises, which range from 4.5 percent to 5.4 percent, take effect January 13th. The new 2002 Salary Tables are located on the OPM web site at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/payrates/>.

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NEW POINT OF ENTRY (POE) MODULE NOW IN PLACE TO HELP EMPLOYEES CREATE PERSONAL ARMY BENEFITS CENTER - CIVILIAN ACCOUNT

(Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md) - The Army Benefit Center –Civilian (ABC-C) web based Employee Benefits Information system (EBIS) now has a new Point of Entry (POE) module in place to make it easier for employees to create their POE account. As of August 22, 2001, modification of the POE application will allow existing EBIS users to enter their Social Security Number (SSN) to access the EBIS, eliminating the need to create a separate user ID. If passwords are forgotten, users can change passwords on-line without having to call ABC-C or the Help desk. Users can also choose to be notified of successful or unsuccessful attempts of a change to a password. Presently, the email notification feature is not available. Users will be notified when this feature is activated. What didn't change was the eight-day waiting period between password changes, this is still in effect. Also, if your password expires, you will receive a warning notice and you must reestablish your password. The same password cannot be used within a 6-month period. If your password is soon to expire, you will also receive a warning notice that passwords must be changed every 90 days.

If you are a new user, you will need to create a POE account. Please follow the guidance in creating your password. Examples are provided on the POE "Create Password" screen in the POE module. Additionally, ensure the correct information (service computation date, civilian pay plan, grade, step, etc.) is entered to identify you as a user of this application. Users may find additional information on the ABC-C home page under the "Announcement" section at www.ABC.army.mil. Kathy Cole, Chief of the ABC-C stated, " These POE changes will allow easier access to EBIS, thus enabling employees to become more self-sufficient in managing their Federal benefits and entitlements."

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COURT ORDERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON FEDERAL BENEFITS

When a court divides your employee health benefits in a divorce or similar action, the order must be clear and unambiguous in its terms. The Merit Systems Protection Board has held that neither it, nor OPM may award survivor benefits based on uncertain or ambiguous orders.

Court orders that relate to the TSP, called "Retirement Benefit Court Orders," must be submitted to the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board. Court orders that relate to the CSRS/FERS must be submitted to the Office of Personnel Management. Upon receipt, the TSP board, OPM or the plan administrator will notify you and the other parties involved if the orders are acceptable, and what affect the orders will have. If you are a party to a divorce, legal separation or annulment, your retirement plan is an important marital asset. A court order may divide a TSP account; divide a CSRS or FERS annuity; permit a former spouse to continue coverage under the FEHB program; or require assignment of FEGLI coverage.

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CSRS RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFUNDS: REFUND OF CSRS CONTRIBUTIONS

Generally, when you leave the Government, you may request a refund. A refund is a lump-sum payment to you of the money in your retirement fund account. A refund includes all retirement contributions deducted from basic pay, and civilian deposits, redeposits, and post-1956 military deposits you have made. The money you contributed to the retirement fund is after taxes have been withheld, so your refund is not subject to Federal income tax. Generally, no interest is paid on refunded CSRS contributions.

You may receive a refund if you are separated from Federal service for at least 31 consecutive days and comply with the spouse and former spouse notification requirements. OPM will not pay a refund if (1) you are eligible to retire within 31 days of separating from service or (2) a qualifying court order awards future benefits to a former spouse.

If you receive a refund of your retirement contributions, you lose your right to any future retirement benefits based on that service. You may repay the refund (with interest) only if you return to Federal service under CSRS or FERS.

To apply for a refund, you must complete SF 2802, Application for Refund of Retirement Deductions. (This form can be obtained from your Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) or the OPM web site at www.opm.gov.) You will send the application directly to OPM.

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FERS RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFUNDS: REFUND OF FERS CONTRIBUTIONS

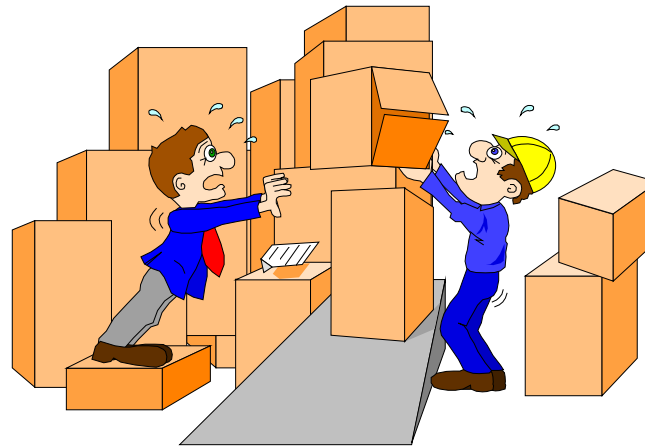
Generally, when you leave the Government, you may request a refund. A refund is a lump-sum payment to you of the money in your retirement fund account. A refund includes all retirement contributions deducted from basic pay, and civilian deposits and post-1956 military deposits you have made. A refund of FERS contributions is paid with interest (variable market rate) if you have at least 1 year of creditable civilian service at date of separation. The money you contributed to the retirement fund is after taxes have been withheld, so your contributions are not subject to Federal income tax when they are withdrawn. However, any interest paid on the contributions is taxable income in the year in which the refund is paid.

You may receive a refund if you are separated from Federal service for at least 31 consecutive days and comply with the spouse and former spouse notification requirements. OPM will not pay a refund if (1) you are eligible to retire within 31 days of separating from service or (2) a qualifying court order awards future benefits to a former spouse.

If you receive a refund of your FERS retirement contributions, you permanently lose any retirement credit for the service covered by the refund. This means you cannot repay the money in the future to regain credit for the service. Therefore, refunded FERS service cannot be counted among the years of service needed to retire or used in computing the amount of annuity.

To apply for a refund, you must complete SF 3106, Application for Refund of Retirement Deductions. (This form can be obtained from your Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) or the OPM web site at www.opm.gov.) You will send the application directly to OPM.

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HOW TO RESEARCH A PERSONNEL ISSUE

The Pacific CPOC has added an article to their website. This document was designed to assist both personnelists and managers in researching civilian personnel issues. Virtually all civilian personnel issues are based on public law, Federal regulations stemming from those laws, executive orders, and various kinds of agency regulations and guidance. To access the document, go to the Pacific Region Internet website at: <http://pacific-cpoc.ak.pac.army.mil/220600/index.html>; connect to the Manager's Toolkit; and then select "How to Research a Personnel Issue".

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RETIREMENT CALCULATOR

Two retirement calculators are available for federal employees. Both are available on the Internet.

OPM Calculator (<http://www.seniors.gov/fedcalc.html>) requires no password. The user will complete a number of entries such as Service Computation Date, anticipated retirement date, current annual salary, etc.

ABC-Civilian Retirement Estimate:

- Employees must be within one year of their retirement date and have a complex service history (e.g. deposit/redeposit time, FF/LEO/ATC, part-time service, intermittent time, etc) to request an estimate. Only one estimate will be provided per employee within 1 year of their retirement date. You can request an annuity estimate by using the automated phone system (IVRS) at (877) 276-9287, select retirement, and then press 0 to speak to a counselor. Your retirement estimate will be processed in approximately 3 weeks and will be mailed to your home address.

- If you are more than 1 year from retirement and would like an estimate, go to the Army Benefits Center-Civilian homepage at <https://www.abc.army.mil>, click on "Benefit Change", logon to EBIS through the POE, click on "Retirement", and then click on "Personal Statement of Benefits" or "Annuity Estimate". This will give you a general estimate.

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TIME OFF AWARD GUIDANCE

Volume 8, Chapter 3, of DoD 7000.14-R, Civilian Pay and Policy Procedures states that time off granted as an incentive award must be used within 1 year from the effective date. To prevent any employee from losing the time off award, we would like to clarify that the 1-year period (26 pay periods) includes the pay period for the date in which the award becomes effective. For example, if you received a time off award with an effective date of 12 August 2001, you count that pay period (which ended 25 August 2001) as the first pay period. You then have 25 more pay periods in which to use the award. Thus, to avoid losing the time off award, you must use it before the end of the 26th pay period (10 August 2002). In addition, we caution employees that time off awards are not paid out at the time of separation from government service. If you transfer employment to a non-Army government agency, your time off award will not transfer.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN CHANGES

There have been some recent changes to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) that will allow for more flexibility in your investment choices, as well as the opportunity to rollover other qualified retirement plans or IRAs. The changes come in time for the next open season and interested employees are able to take advantage of them during the next open season. The TSP is a retirement savings and investment plan for Federal employees it was established by Congress through the Federal Employees' Retirement System Act of 1986. It was developed to provide Federal employees the same type of savings and tax benefits that many private corporations offer their employees with 401(k) plans. Employees have two opportunities a year to make changes to their investment choices called Open Seasons.

The recent change to Public Law 106-361 allows participating employees to transfer eligible rollover distributions from qualified retirement plans (or their designated financial institutions) or from conduit Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) into their TSP account. To accomplish the rollover, participating employees need to use form "TSP-60 Request for a Transfer in the TSP". Participants who are separated from Federal service are eligible to participate. However, a separated participant who is receiving monthly payments from his/her account cannot transfer money into it.

In addition, TSP investment choices have also been updated to include information on the Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) fund and the International Stock Index Investment (I) fund. These funds are available as investment choices for participating members. Finally, TSP information has also been updated to reflect the procedural changes for making contribution allocations. Allocation changes are important because they reflect the future deposits to your TSP account. For further information and forms, see the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov>.

